

MOTION BY SUPERVISORS MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS

March 25, 2014

AND ZEV YAROSLAVSKY

Relates to Item 1-H

Addressing Barriers to Housing for the Chronically Homeless Population

Chronically homeless people are among the most vulnerable members of our society. They tend to have high rates of behavioral health problems, including severe mental illness and substance abuse disorders, and are frequent users of emergency services and public safety systems.

While access to affordable permanent housing is considered the most critical resource needed to address chronic homelessness, in many cases, the chronically homeless have difficulty meeting some of the standards to qualify for assistance administered through the Housing Authority of the County of Los Angeles (HACoLA). Specifically HACoLA's criminal look back period and ban on individuals on parole and probation have been identified as significant barriers to access housing.

In response to this, HACoLA implemented as part of its homeless Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) set aside program, special screening standards for homeless families that reduced the criminal background look back period from three to two years and lifted the prohibition on parole and probation. However, on June 10, 2013, HUD

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released PIH Notice 2013-15 which confirmed that housing authorities could not set vouchers aside specifically for the homeless or adopt different screening criteria for different populations within the HCV program. In response, HACoLA has proposed the adoption of a limited waitlist preference for homeless families in lieu of the previous set aside program. However, HACoLA recommends keeping the criminal look back period at three years and the prohibition on probation and parole for the entire HCV program rather than changing this general policy to meet the specific needs of the chronically homeless, which comprise a select number of overall voucher applicants.

The chronically homeless face unique barriers to qualifying for services and the criteria to be used in housing this population should be able to incorporate these realities. The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development has advised that in order to rely on specific eligibility criteria for the chronically homeless, HACoLA needs express legal authority, similar to what has been implemented for veterans through the Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) program. A statutory change should be pursued to allow HACoLA to assist the homeless population without fundamentally altering the admission and eligibility policies that have been deemed reasonable for the population at large. This approach would build upon the work that HACoLA is already doing to promote effective outcomes amongst the chronically homeless by ensuring that they are placed in housing with integrated supportive services.

**WE THEREFORE MOVE ACTING AS THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS OF
THE HOUSING AUTHORITY OF THE COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES:**

Direct the Executive Director to take all action necessary to advocate for federal statutory and regulatory measures that would provide the legal authority for developing a housing assistance program that can meet the specific needs of the chronically homeless population.